

COLLOQUY

DOUG McIlroy, as a fan of Word Ways, says ‘how impressed I am by the fully on line, excellently indexed, and *free* publication of Word Ways’. He also replied to Jeff Grant’s most recent Colloquy contribution, including a minor amplification of his note on alphabetic trigrams and tetragrams.

Jeff Grant asked, “Are there other words [besides **Afghanophile** and **Afghanophobe**] containing two alphabetic trigrams?” [“Colloquy”, WW 51 #1 (2018)]

Well, to be picky, there are. Jeff himself implicitly presented some in “Alphabetic trigrams and tetragrams”, WW 32 #2 (1999). Two familiar examples that contain trigrams RST and STU are **understudy** and **overstuffed**. Somewhat more arcane are MNO-NOP words such as **limnophile**, **somnopathy** and **cremnophobia**, all in *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition*. Classical music lovers may be familiar with Erik Satie’s “**Gymnopédies**”.

Of course Jeff’s question is about nonoverlapping trigrams, but doesn’t say so. How could a word-player resist? A quick computer check of Webster 2 turned up 31 words with two alphabetic trigrams. The list consists entirely of MNOP words (19) and RSTU words (12). (The adjective **overstuffed** is represented in the list by its much less common verbal root, **overstuff**.)

I’m curious about Jeff’s 1999 assertion that **understudy** “is probably the only everyday word” that sports an alphabetic tetragram. **Overstuffed**, as applied to furniture, also strikes me as an everyday word. Is it, like **saloon** for cars, one of those words that distinguishes national brands of English? (Jeff lives in New Zealand; I live in America.)

JEFF GRANT responded to Darryl Francis’ question: ‘Is PUTATIVENESS a word?’ asks Darryl Francis in the last Word Ways. Yes, of course, as are tens (hundreds?) of thousands of nondictionary terms, most of which can be found in written sources, particularly on the Internet. A more common word than PUTATIVENESS having the same property is the similar FUGITIVENESS, which is found in many dictionaries. Reading every third letter gives the words FIVE, UTES and GINS.

RON SINGER asks: “My wife and I were discussing the word “pretty,” and wondered where the adverbial modifier of adjectives came from —e.g. “pretty good.” A search of both the OED and other sources yielded only the fact that the usage first appeared during the late-16th century. My own guess is that it may have slid over from the French, *pres*, meaning “near.” Do you know the answer or, if not, might you want to ask the question in *Word Ways*?”